Collective Readiness

A Theoretical Framework for the Preparatory Condition of Groups Prior to Shared Action

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Abstract

I kept hearing the same thing. Directors using a brief routine I had developed for rehearsals, across a university jazz program and a community choir, described a recognizable pattern: rooms settled faster, less repeated instruction was needed, the ensemble found a shared pulse more quickly, the first downbeat felt different. This paper proposes a name for what I may have been hearing about — **Collective Readiness** — and develops the theoretical case for treating it as a real, group-level phenomenon, distinct from the readiness of any individual member of a group.

Collective readiness is defined as the degree to which a group has gathered its attention, presence, and capacity for coordinated participation prior to engaging in shared activity, and is distinguished from related group-level constructs — cohesion, collective efficacy, psychological safety, shared mental models, swift trust, and organizational readiness for change — on the grounds that it concerns the group's *entry condition* rather than its interpersonal bonds, beliefs, or knowledge structures. Drawing on research in ritual studies, interpersonal synchrony, and team science, the paper advances a threshold hypothesis: that collective readiness is produced during transitional periods preceding collective activity, and that the structural conditions for these periods can be intentionally supported through shared ritual and structured pause, without requiring any change to what individual members feel. Because the specific protocol examined here — developed independently of, and prior to, the theory built to explain it — operates through a private, individual-level act, the paper introduces **Internal State Orientation** as a formally distinct antecedent construct, and proposes that collective readiness is the group-level *outcome* it may produce under specific structural conditions, not a rival description of the same thing.

This is a theory-building paper. The observations that motivated it are anecdotal, and the theory is offered as a framework for understanding them, not as a confirmed account. The paper is direct about what remains open — chiefly, whether collective readiness is a single, coherent construct or whether the pattern is better explained by simpler mechanisms operating under an unfamiliar name — and closes by proposing directions for the empirical work that could settle the question.

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1. Introduction

I kept hearing the same thing. Directors using a brief routine I had developed for rehearsals — across a university jazz program and a community choir — described a recognizable pattern: "The room settles faster." "I repeat myself less." "The ensemble finds a shared pulse more quickly." "The first downbeat feels different."

These are anecdotal observations, not findings, gathered through surveys I administered myself. Sections 8 and 11 say more about that. What is worth separating out now, before the theory begins, is two different questions this paper keeps distinct throughout: whether something is happening, and what that something is. The first is the easier one to recognize: a group can seem to enter an activity differently depending on what happens in the seconds before it begins, and anyone who has watched a choir settle before its first note, or a team huddle before taking the field, has likely seen some version of it. The second — what is changing, and whether it is a property of the group at all rather than simply of the individuals who compose it — is what this paper is actually trying to answer, and it is the question this paper builds a theory toward, not one it claims to have already settled.

Across disciplines, considerable attention has been devoted to the readiness of individuals. Psychologists study emotional readiness, cognitive readiness, and psychological readiness; educators examine learning readiness; sport scientists study performance readiness; and organizational scholars assess readiness for change (Weiner, 2009). Each of these literatures shares an implicit unit of analysis: the person.

Yet many of the activities that matter most in human life are not individual activities — they are collective ones. Ensembles perform. Teams compete. Classes learn. Organizations decide. Communities respond. Juries deliberate. Surgical teams operate. In each of these contexts, the outcome of the activity depends not only on the readiness of the individuals who compose the group, but on some property of the *group as a system*.

This raises a question that has received surprisingly little direct theoretical treatment: **can groups possess a form of readiness that is distinct from the readiness of any individual member?**

The team-science literature has approached adjacent questions — how teams build shared knowledge structures (Cannon-Bowers, Salas, & Converse, 1993), how they develop trust under time pressure (Meyerson, Weick, & Kramer, 1996), how they establish norms before beginning work (Mathieu & Rapp, 2009), and how they enter peak collaborative states once underway (Sawyer, 2003). What remains comparatively under-theorized is the narrower, more immediate phenomenon: the condition of the group in the moments *just before* it begins to act together — the interval in which a collection of individuals either does, or does not, become a functioning collective.

This paper proposes **Collective Readiness** as a name for that condition. It offers a working definition, distinguishes the construct from its neighbors, advances a threshold hypothesis grounded in ritual and synchrony research, identifies observable indicators, and outlines a research agenda by which the construct — and the directors' observation that motivated it — can be put to a direct test.

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2. Theoretical Context: Situating Collective Readiness in the Literature on Group Functioning

Before collective readiness can be usefully defined, it is necessary to locate it against the constructs that already populate the small-group and team-science literatures. None of these constructs, taken alone, fully captures the phenomenon described above — but each illuminates a piece of it.

2.1 Group Cohesion

Cohesion is typically defined in the sport and team-dynamics literature as the tendency of a group to stick together and remain unified in pursuit of its goals (Carron, Brawley, & Widmeyer, 1998). Cohesion describes the *strength of bonds* among members — a relatively stable, slowly developing property of the group's social fabric. It does not, by itself, describe whether a group is prepared to begin a specific shared activity at a specific moment.

2.2 Collective Efficacy

Bandura (1997) defined collective efficacy as a group's shared belief in its conjoint capability to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce a given level of attainment. Collective efficacy is therefore a belief about *capability* — confidence in what the group can accomplish — rather than a condition of *preparedness* for entering an activity. A group can hold strong collective efficacy beliefs while remaining, in the moment, unsettled, distracted, or not yet coordinated for the task at hand.

2.3 Psychological Safety

Edmondson (1999) defined team psychological safety as a shared belief held by members of a team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking — the confidence that one will not be embarrassed, rejected, or punished for speaking up. Psychological safety concerns the *interpersonal climate* in which a team operates over time. It is a necessary condition for many forms of group learning and voice, but it does not, on its own, describe the transitional state through which a group moves from assembly into coordinated action.

2.4 Shared Mental Models and Team Cognition

Cannon-Bowers, Salas, and Converse (1993) proposed that effective team performance depends on members holding compatible, overlapping cognitive representations of the task, procedures, and one another's roles — what has come to be called a shared mental model. This research tradition is concerned with the *content of team cognition*: whether members understand the task and each other in

compatible ways. Collective readiness is related but distinct — a team can hold a well-developed shared mental model of a task while nonetheless entering a given session distracted, fragmented, or not yet "present" as a coordinated unit.

2.5 Swift Trust

Meyerson, Weick, and Kramer (1996) introduced the concept of swift trust to describe how temporary groups — film crews, ad hoc task forces, crisis-response teams — behave as though trust were already present despite lacking any history of interaction, because time pressure does not permit trust to develop through the usual evidentiary process. Swift trust theory is valuable to the present framework because it demonstrates that groups can rapidly assume a functional posture toward one another without the lengthy relational history that older models of trust presumed necessary. This lends plausibility to the claim that collective readiness, too, might be achievable quickly, through structured means, rather than only through prolonged familiarity.

2.6 Team Launch and Chartering Research

A separate research tradition has examined what happens at the *start* of a team's life. Mathieu and Rapp (2009) found that teams that invested time in establishing a team charter — a shared statement of purpose, roles, and norms — exhibited more favorable performance trajectories over time than teams that did not. This "team launch" literature establishes that the earliest moments of a team's existence have disproportionate downstream consequences, a principle that generalizes from the founding of a team to the *opening* of any given session of collective work. It supports the threshold hypothesis advanced in Section 5: what happens at the boundary of an activity shapes what is possible within it.

2.7 Group Flow

Sawyer (2003), building on Csikszentmihalyi's individual flow theory, defined group flow as a collective state that occurs when a group is performing at the peak of its abilities — characterized by deep mutual listening, moment-to-moment responsiveness, and the emergence of collaborative outcomes no individual member could have produced alone. Group flow describes a *peak state during* an activity. Collective readiness, by contrast, describes the *threshold condition before* an activity. The two may be related — a well-prepared group may be more likely to reach group flow — but they are temporally and conceptually distinct.

2.8 Interpersonal Synchrony and Entrainment

A substantial body of experimental research demonstrates that synchronized behavior between people — tapping, walking, breathing, or moving in time together — increases affiliation, rapport, and a sense of self–other merging (Hove & Risen, 2009; Wiltermuth & Heath, 2009). Physiological synchrony, such as the alignment of heart-rate patterns between group members, has been shown to predict both subjective feelings of group cohesion and subsequent task performance (Mønster et al., as cited in Gordon et al., 2020). This literature offers a plausible *mechanism* for how shared ritual might produce collective readiness: coordinated bodily and temporal experience appears to be one of the most reliable routes by which a collection of individuals comes to function, even briefly, as a single coordinated system.

2.9 Liminality and Ritual Transition

Anthropological research on ritual offers a structural vocabulary for the transitional period this paper is concerned with. Van Gennep ([1909] 1960) proposed that rites of passage move participants through three phases: separation, transition (the liminal phase), and incorporation. Turner (1969) extended this framework, arguing that the liminal phase — the threshold itself — is where ordinary social structure is suspended and a distinctive bond among co-participants, which he termed *communitas*, becomes possible. Turner's threshold concept (from the Latin *limen*, meaning threshold) maps closely onto the phenomenon this paper describes: the period in which a group is "betwixt and between," no longer simply an assembly of individuals and not yet a functioning collective engaged in its task. The huddle before a team competes, the tuning before an orchestra performs, or the silence before a meeting begins are everyday, secular analogues of the ritual threshold that anthropologists have documented across cultures.

2.10 Real-Time Listening and Interaction in Jazz Performance

A further literature, drawn from ethnomusicology and jazz studies rather than organizational psychology, bears directly on collective readiness. Improvised ensemble performance depends on a particularly demanding form of real-time listening: musicians must continuously hear one another, anticipate emerging musical choices, and adjust their own playing accordingly (Berliner, 1994). Monson (1996) described the resulting coordination as a felt sense of being "in the groove" together, in which timing and response come to feel mutually generated rather than individually produced. This literature is useful to the present framework because it identifies, from within a performance tradition rather than a laboratory, the same underlying problem collective readiness is meant to address: musicians arrive at a rehearsal or performance from different attentional states, and the ensemble typically has to spend its opening bars catching up to itself before this kind of mutual listening becomes possible. Section 8 reports a field case in which a brief pre-downbeat protocol was used to compress or eliminate that catch-up period.

2.11 Musical Expectation and Harmonic Function

A separate body of music-cognition research examines how harmony shapes attention over time. Meyer (1956) proposed that much of the emotional and attentional experience of tonal music arises from implication and realization — the way a musical pattern creates an expectation that is then confirmed, delayed, or denied. Huron (2006) extended this into a general psychological theory of expectation, showing how specific compositional devices (cadences, suspensions, dominant harmony) systematically heighten anticipatory tension by signaling that a resolution is imminent. This literature establishes that harmony is not affectively or attentionally neutral: functional, directional harmony actively recruits a listener's attention toward a future event. Section 8 draws on this work to argue that any sustained sound used as a containing device in a pre-activity threshold should avoid this directional pull, favoring open or non-functional sonorities instead.

2.12 Holding Environments

Winnicott (1960) introduced the concept of a *holding environment* to describe a relational or physical space whose function is to support an internal process — originally, an infant's emotional development — by providing reliable, non-intrusive containment rather than active stimulation or direction. The concept has since been extended well beyond its original developmental context to describe any space designed to protect an internal process from interruption (see, e.g., later applications in therapeutic and organizational settings). The present framework borrows this concept, at a structural rather than clinical level, to characterize the function of a containing interval that follows an act of internal orientation: its purpose is to hold space for that orientation, not to add content to it.

2.13 Multilevel Emergence: Composition versus Compilation

A final, foundational literature concerns how individual-level phenomena come to count as properties of a group at all — a question that becomes unavoidable once a protocol for cultivating collective readiness turns out to operate, in practice, through a private, individual-level act (Section 8.2). Kozlowski and Klein (2000) distinguish two broad forms this kind of emergence can take. *Composition* models describe constructs that are essentially isomorphic across levels: the group-level property is the same content as the individual-level property, aggregated through convergence, consensus, or averaging. Collective efficacy, organizational climate, and group norms are typically modeled this way — the group is said to hold the property to the extent that members come to share a common perception or belief (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000; see also Chan, 1998, on referent-shift consensus models). *Compilation* models describe a different, less commonly recognized form of emergence, in which the group-level property arises from the *pattern, array, or configuration* of distinct — even idiosyncratic — individual-level inputs, rather than from their convergence. Team

composition of diverse skills or personalities is a standard example: the team-level property (functional diversity) is constituted precisely by members differing from one another, not by their agreeing. This distinction matters directly for collective readiness and is taken up in Section 8.5.

Composition and compilation are both *emergent* constructs in Kozlowski and Klein's (2000) terms: both describe psychological content at the individual level combining into a psychological property at the group level. Their broader framework distinguishes these from *contextual* conditions — structural or situational features of an environment that shape or enable emergence without themselves being emergent psychological properties. A shared physical environment, for instance, is contextual; a shared belief that develops within it is emergent. This distinction is taken up again in Section 8.5, where it bears on which parts of a threshold protocol should be understood as emergent constructs and which should be understood as the context surrounding them.

2.14 Preparatory and Pre-Performance Routines

A closer structural precedent for the Pause–Orient–Contain–Continue protocol than any literature reviewed so far comes from sport psychology's research on preparatory routines. Orbach and Blumenstein (2022) describe a taxonomy of brief, fixed, repeatable behavioral and mental sequences athletes use to regulate attention and emotion immediately before performance, distinguishing pre-competitive activity routines (used the day before competition), pre-performance routines (used immediately before a discrete skill, such as a free throw or a serve), and post-performance routines used afterward. This literature treats such routines as functional, performance-bound interventions: their purpose is to produce a specific, imminent action, not to cultivate a general capacity, and their content is typically a fixed, idiosyncratic sequence of cues rather than an attempt to induce a particular universal psychological state. The Pause–Orient–Contain–Continue protocol (Section 8) is structurally closer to a pre-performance routine in this sense than to a contemplative practice: it is brief, fixed in sequence, repeated identically before each activity, and oriented entirely toward an imminent, specific task rather than toward cultivating a standing disposition.

This structural resemblance comes with an important divergence in aim, however. Preparatory-routine research frames these sequences explicitly as regulation tools — devices for moving an athlete from a suboptimal state (distraction, excess arousal, anxiety) toward a more optimal one (focus, an appropriate arousal level) before a specific action (Orbach & Blumenstein, 2022). Internal state orientation makes no such claim: it has no optimal target state and no regulatory aim, and Section 3.2 sets out this boundary condition explicitly. The structural parallel — brief, fixed, repeated, task-bound — is what this paper draws on from the preparatory-routines literature; the regulatory aim is not part of what is being borrowed.

2.15 Why Not Mindfulness

Internal state orientation (Section 3.1) resembles mindfulness on the surface, and the nearest team-level analogue — Yu and Zellmer-Bruhn's (2018) *team mindfulness*, a shared belief characterized by present-moment, non-judgmental awareness within a team — might seem to invite treating the two as the same construct under different names. They are not. Mindfulness, as commonly operationalized, is an ongoing capacity cultivated through repeated practice and valued partly for its own sake. Internal state orientation is a single, momentary, task-bound act — locate a color and move on — with an explicit instruction against further processing ("no discussion, no debrief"), built on a non-verbal, non-introspective referent precisely to avoid the naming and exploration of experience that mindfulness instruction typically involves.

This distinction follows Van Dam et al.'s (2018) influential critique of mindfulness research, which found the term used so inconsistently across measures and traditions that it undermines cumulative science, and recommended researchers move toward precise, differentiated descriptions of specific mental states rather than the broad mindfulness umbrella. Internal state orientation is offered as that kind of narrow description, not a rebranded instance of the broader construct — which is why Section 2.14's preparatory-routines literature, not the mindfulness literature, is this paper's nearest precedent.

2.16 Color and Internal State: What the Literature Supports and What Remains Unresolved

Two further bodies of research bear on the use of color as the orienting channel in Orient (Section 8.2). Bradley and Lang (1994) developed the Self-Assessment Manikin (SAM), a non-verbal, pictorial self-report instrument validated across several decades of affective-science research. Its central finding — that a brief, picture-based self-report can capture subjective state with low cognitive burden and without requiring verbal labeling — supports the general plausibility of a non-verbal locating channel of the kind Orient uses, independent of the specific images or symbols involved.

Separately, Jonauskaite et al. (2020), in a study of nearly 4,600 participants across 30 nations, found that color-emotion associations are not arbitrary: particular colors are linked to particular emotion concepts with substantial cross-cultural consistency, further modulated by linguistic and geographic proximity. Read alongside the "no right answer" framing in Section 8.2, this finding is a genuine tension, not a settled one: if color carries shared meaning, locating a color is not free of imposed categorization in the way a deliberately arbitrary token would be.

I selected color partly because it functions as a *universal* medium — broadly legible across a heterogeneous group without shared vocabulary or instruction — while remaining a vehicle for *individualized* meaning-making, since no participant's specific reason for choosing a color is ever declared or required to align with anyone else's. This is worth recording as part of the design

rationale, but a stated intent is not evidence that a channel works as intended; whether the universal layer crowds out individualized meaning in practice is an empirical question this paper has no data to answer.

The same universal-medium/individualized-content structure resembles the compilation logic developed for collective readiness itself (Section 2.13; Section 8.5). This parallel is an interpretive connection, not a finding: two things in the same content domain sharing a structural shape is not, by itself, support for either one, and the empirical status of the color question remains exactly as open as stated above (Section 11).

2.17 Why Not Zones of Regulation

The nearest existing precedent for a color-coded internal-state check-in — especially for an audience in K-12 and ensemble education — is Leah Kuypers's *Zones of Regulation* (Kuypers, 2011): a widely used curriculum that sorts feelings into four fixed color zones (Blue, Green, Yellow, Red) and teaches students strategies for moving toward Green. Given how widely it is used in schools, it is more likely than mindfulness to be a reader's first association, and needs naming directly rather than left for someone else to raise.

The two differ on every dimension Section 3.2 treats as definitional. Zones of Regulation assigns fixed, taught meanings to each color, where Orient assigns none. It is, by design, a regulation curriculum — students learn their zone specifically as a precursor to "strategies to return to green" — where internal state orientation has no target state and no strategy step. And it originates in occupational therapy and special-education practice, precisely the clinical lineage the non-pathologizing design rationale (Section 8.2) was built to avoid. Where Zones of Regulation teaches a vocabulary and trains students to act on it, Orient asks only that a color be located and then protected, unaltered, into the activity that follows.

2.18 A Necessary Disambiguation: Weiner's Organizational Readiness for Change

The phrase "collective readiness" is not coined here in a vacuum — related language already exists in implementation science, and a reader who searches the term will find it. Weiner (2009) developed an influential theory of organizational readiness for change, defining it as a shared psychological state combining members' collective resolve to implement a specific change (change commitment) with their collective confidence in carrying it out (change efficacy); follow-on work has used the phrase "collective readiness" for this same construct.

The two share a family resemblance — both are group-level preconditions for action — but operate at different timescales. Weiner's construct concerns an organization's medium- to long-term readiness for a specific change initiative, built from beliefs that closely resemble Bandura's (1997) collective efficacy (Section 2.2) at the organizational level. The construct proposed here concerns the narrow,

repeatable, moment-to-moment threshold a group passes through immediately before any shared activity — not commitment to a future change, but whether members have, right now, entered the activity together. A reader who encounters “collective readiness” in the implementation-science literature should not assume the two are identical; this paper’s usage is deliberately narrower in scope and shorter in timescale, offered as a related but distinct contribution.

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3. Defining Collective Readiness

Building on the constructs reviewed above, **Collective Readiness** may be defined as:

> *The condition in which a group has sufficiently gathered its attention, presence, and capacity for coordinated participation prior to engaging in shared action.*

Several features of this definition deserve emphasis.

It is not agreement. A group does not need to share opinions, conclusions, or preferences to be collectively ready; it needs only to be prepared to enter the activity together.

It is not emotional similarity. Members may carry different moods, energy levels, or emotional states into a shared activity while the group as a whole remains collectively ready. (Section 8.5 returns to this point with a more formal account of why convergence of internal content is not required for a group-level property to emerge.)

It is not cohesion. As established in Section 2.1, cohesion is a slower-developing property of interpersonal bonds; collective readiness can be present in groups with limited relational history (consistent with swift trust theory; Meyerson et al., 1996).

It is not collective efficacy. A group may doubt its eventual success while still being well prepared to begin; conversely, a confident group may be poorly prepared in a given moment.

The defining characteristic of collective readiness is **coordinated entry**: the degree to which the group, as a unit, is positioned to begin acting together rather than as a set of separately arriving individuals. It is worth noting in advance that this is close to the language directors reached for on their own, struggling to describe what they were seeing (Section 8.3) — not mood or energy, but members “arriving together.”

A concrete preview. The clearest instance of collective readiness available to this paper is a four-step routine — Pause, Orient, Contain, Continue — developed by a music educator for ensemble rehearsals and examined in full, including its evidentiary status, in Section 8. Briefly: a director marks a short pause before sound begins; each musician silently locates a color that feels closest to where they are right now, with nothing shared or discussed; the director holds a brief interval of sound or silence; then the ensemble plays. The sections that follow are built to explain why a sequence this simple might matter, and to specify what would need to be true for it to matter in the way this paper proposes.

3.1 Internal State Orientation: An Antecedent Construct

The field case examined in Section 8 clarifies a distinction the definition above leaves implicit. Collective readiness, as defined, is not itself the thing the Pause–Orient–Contain–Continue protocol directly produces. What the protocol directly produces, at the level of mechanism, is **Internal State Orientation**: the degree to which an individual has located and briefly registered their own present attentional or affective state before being asked to direct that attention outward into a shared activity. Internal state orientation is an individual-level construct — each participant either has or has not performed this act, in the same sense that each participant either has or has not warmed up before rehearsal.

Collective readiness is best understood as the **group-level outcome** that internal state orientation is hypothesized to produce, under the structural conditions developed in Section 8.5: when internal state orientation is performed by every member of a group, at the same marked moment, inside the same shared frame. The relationship between the two constructs is therefore not one of equivalence, and not one of rivalry, but of **antecedent and outcome** — internal state orientation is the individual-level input; collective readiness is the group-level state that may emerge from it, given the right structural conditions. This also gives the framework a more tractable empirical structure (Section 9): rather than asking whether collective readiness "really" exists as opposed to internal state orientation, research can instead ask whether individual-level internal state orientation, performed under shared structural conditions, predicts the group-level outcomes identified in Section 6 — a standard antecedent-to-outcome question rather than a contest between two candidate constructs.

Internal state orientation is named and scoped deliberately to avoid collapsing into the mindfulness literature, despite a surface resemblance to it; Section 2.15 sets out why the two should not be treated as equivalent.

3.2 A Boundary Condition: Internal State Orientation Is Not a Regulatory Construct

A risk evident across the literatures reviewed in Section 2 — mindfulness, preparatory routines, emotional regulation research generally — is that any construct involving attention to internal state tends to be read, by default, as an intervention aimed at moving that state somewhere better: toward calm, toward focus, toward an optimal performance zone. Internal state orientation, as designed and as used in the *My Serenata* framework, makes no such claim and pursues no such aim. It has no target state. A participant who locates a color associated with distraction, anxiety, flatness, or any other quality has completed the act successfully; nothing in the protocol asks them to move toward a different color, a calmer state, or a more "ready" disposition, and the Contain step that follows (Section 8.2) is explicitly designed to protect whatever was located rather than to act on it.

The relevant change, where any occurs, happens only at the antecedent-outcome boundary established in Section 3.1: a group of members who have each located their own state, whatever it is, is hypothesized to enter coordinated activity differently than a group of members who have not — not because any individual's internal state was altered, but because the gap between an unexamined and a located state has closed for each of them, in parallel. This boundary condition is binding on every other section of this paper: language describing cultivation, support, or production applies only to the group-level outcome (collective readiness) and the structural conditions that may give rise to it, never to the content of any individual's internal state.

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4. Distinguishing Collective Readiness from Related Constructs

The table below summarizes the conceptual boundaries between collective readiness and the constructs reviewed in Section 2.

Construct	Core Question It Answers	Temporal Character	Primary Literature
Individual readiness	"Is this person ready?"	Person-level, situational	Educational & sport psychology
Group cohesion	"Are we bonded to one another?"	Slow-developing, stable	Carron, Brawley, & Widmeyer, 1998
Collective efficacy	"Do we believe we can succeed?"	Belief, moderately stable	Bandura, 1997

Construct	Core Question It Answers	Temporal Character	Primary Literature
Psychological safety	“Is it safe to take interpersonal risks here?”	Climate, develops over time	Edmondson, 1999
Shared mental models	“Do we understand the task and each other compatibly?”	Cognitive, develops with experience	Cannon-Bowers, Salas, & Converse, 1993
Swift trust	“Can we act as if we trust each other, despite no history?”	Rapid, assumed at outset	Meyerson, Weick, & Kramer, 1996
Group flow	“Are we performing at our collective peak right now?”	In-activity, peak state	Sawyer, 2003
Organizational readiness for change (also called “collective readiness” in some implementation-science literature)	“Are we committed to, and confident we can carry out, this specific change?”	Medium- to long-term, change-specific	Weiner, 2009 (Section 2.18)
Collective readiness (this paper)	**“Are we prepared to enter this activity together, right now?”**	**Threshold, immediately pre-activity**	**Proposed in this paper**

Collective readiness is the construct that occupies the moment the others do not directly address: the narrow interval of transition itself. Internal state orientation (Section 3.1) does not appear as a row in this table because it is not a peer, group-level rival to be distinguished from collective readiness — it sits one level of analysis below all of the constructs listed, as a proposed individual-level antecedent of the group-level outcome the table compares.

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5. The Threshold Hypothesis: A Process Model

One way to understand collective readiness is through the concept of *thresholds*. Before most collective activities, groups pass through a transitional period — the moments before a rehearsal begins, the period before a performance, a classroom settling before instruction, a team gathering

before competition, the silence before a meeting opens. These intervals correspond closely to what Van Gennep ([1909] 1960) called the liminal phase of a rite of passage, and what Turner (1969) described as a threshold state in which ordinary structure is temporarily suspended.

These moments are frequently marked by ritual. Teams huddle. Choirs breathe together. Orchestras tune. Congregations fall quiet. Facilitators welcome participants. These rituals appear to serve a common function: they help draw a collection of individuals into a functioning collective, without requiring that any individual's internal state be altered in the process. This paper's **threshold hypothesis** proposes that collective readiness is the condition produced by a successful transition through this threshold period, and that the period can be modeled in three phases, adapted from Van Gennep's tripartite structure:

1. **Separation.** Individuals disengage, however briefly, from the activities, roles, and attentional states that preceded the gathering.
2. **Threshold (liminal) entrainment.** The group engages in some shared temporal, attentional, or physical experience — a ritual, a pause, a breath, a piece of music, a structured welcome — that prepares members, individually or jointly, for the activity to come. This phase may operate through direct interpersonal synchrony (Hove & Risen, 2009; Wiltermuth & Heath, 2009), or, as the protocol examined in Section 8 suggests, through parallel individual-level acts of internal state orientation (Section 3.1) held within a shared structural frame. Both routes are treated here as instances of the same general phase; which route a given practice relies on is a question about mechanism, not a difference in the phase's function within the model.
3. **Coordinated entry.** The group moves into the shared activity as a unit rather than as separately arriving individuals. This is the observable signature of collective readiness — the group-level *outcome* that internal state orientation (Section 3.1), held under phase 2, is hypothesized to produce.

Where Mathieu and Rapp's (2009) team-launch research demonstrates that the founding moments of a team's *entire lifespan* shape its later performance trajectory, the threshold hypothesis proposes an analogous, smaller-scale dynamic: the founding moments of *each individual session* of collective activity shape what becomes possible within that session.

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6. Observable Indicators

If collective readiness is a real and distinct condition, it should be possible to observe its presence or absence. Candidate indicators, drawn from the constructs reviewed above and from everyday observation of ensembles, classrooms, and teams, include:

- Faster coordinated entry into the activity, with less time spent settling
- Reduced transition time between the gathering and the start of substantive work
- Increased attentional stability once the activity begins
- Improved listening and responsiveness among members
- Greater responsiveness to facilitation or direction
- Smoother recovery following an interruption
- Increased anticipation of, or willing participation in, collective rituals
- Informal reports that “the room feels different”

Critically, these indicators occur at the level of the group rather than the individual. A facilitator, teacher, conductor, or coach may be able to sense collective readiness directly, even before formal measurement instruments exist to capture it (see Section 9).

In the settings reported in Section 8.3, these general indicators took the observed form of faster settling at the start of rehearsal, less need for directors to repeat instructions, quicker convergence on a shared pulse or tempo, and a qualitatively different feel to the opening of the activity. These are offered as setting-specific examples of the general indicators above, not as a separate set of criteria.

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7. Supporting Conditions for Collective Readiness: Practices and Mechanisms

If collective readiness exists as a distinct phenomenon, it follows that the structural conditions for it can be deliberately supported rather than left to chance. Candidate practices include:

- **Shared ritual** — a consistent opening sequence that the group comes to recognize and anticipate
- **Structured pauses** — a deliberate moment of stillness before activity begins
- **Orientation practices** — brief framing of purpose and expectations, paralleling the function of team charters in Mathieu and Rapp’s (2009) research

- **Breath work** — coordinated breathing, which has documented synchronizing effects on physiological state (Mønster et al., as cited in Gordon et al., 2020)
- **Silence** — a deliberate absence of stimulus that allows individual attention to settle before shared attention is requested
- **Musical containment** — the use of music or sound to entrain a group temporally, drawing on the broader literature connecting rhythmic entrainment to social bonding (Hove & Risen, 2009; Tarr, Launay, & Dunbar, 2014, as referenced in synchrony research)
- **Facilitated transitions** — a person or structure that explicitly marks the boundary between "before" and "now"
- **Coordinated temporal experiences** — any activity that requires members to move, breathe, speak, or attend in time with one another

The function of these practices is not emotional regulation. The function is preparation for shared action — building, in Turner's (1969) terms, the kind of threshold passage that allows a collection of individuals to enter coordinated activity together. Consistent with the boundary condition in Section 3.2, none of these practices are aimed at changing what any individual member feels; they create structural conditions — a marked threshold, a held interval — within which whatever a member already feels can be located and carried into the activity unaltered.

It is worth noting a boundary condition implied by the swift-trust literature (Meyerson et al., 1996): these threshold practices need not depend on a long relational history among members. Just as temporary teams can function as though trust were present from the outset, newly assembled groups may be able to achieve collective readiness quickly, through structure rather than familiarity — a claim with direct relevance to ensembles, classrooms, and teams that reconstitute frequently.

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8. Application: Collective Readiness and the *My Serenata* Framework

8.1 The Instruments

Within the *My Serenata* framework, collective readiness functions as the central theoretical *outcome* — the condition the framework as a whole is oriented toward supporting — while internal state orientation (Section 3.1) is the construct its instruments directly target. The wheel, the protocol, the facilitator guides, the digital orientation instrument, and Collective Mode can each be understood as

mechanisms designed to hold space for internal state orientation in individual participants — not to produce, improve, or direct it (Section 3.2) — under structural conditions hypothesized to compile that orientation into collective readiness at the group level.

From this perspective:

- The wheel is not the intervention.
- The protocol is not the intervention.
- The application is not the intervention.

These are instruments through which collective readiness may be supported. The construct itself — the group's threshold passage into coordinated entry — remains the primary object of theoretical interest. This reframing has a practical implication: the success of any given *My Serenata* tool should ultimately be evaluated not by engagement with the tool itself, but by whether it measurably moves a group from assembly toward the observable indicators of collective readiness outlined in Section 6.

8.2 A Worked Instantiation: The Pause–Orient–Contain–Continue Protocol

A concrete instantiation of these instruments has been developed and field-tested in ensemble-rehearsal settings; I describe its development at greater length elsewhere (Motley, 2026) and reprise the core sequence here. Across the sequence, the organizing purpose is **internal state orientation**: each participant locates where their own attention and energy currently are before being asked to direct that attention outward into shared listening and playing. The protocol takes under ten seconds, requires no materials, and is inserted at the start of rehearsal — or before any downbeat — without altering the surrounding rehearsal plan. It consists of four steps, intended to be run in the same order every time:

1. **Pause.** The director marks a brief threshold before sound begins. The room is given a moment to stop arriving.
2. **Orient.** A color wheel is mounted or projected in the rehearsal space, and musicians are invited to "locate the color that feels closest to where you are right now." There is no right answer and nothing to share; the task is simply to locate and hold an internal reference point. (This step is the wheel instrument referenced in Section 8.1, operationalized as the protocol's central orienting act.)
3. **Contain.** The director holds a brief shared interval — sound or silence — long enough for that internal location to settle, closing with a brief time lapse before the activity resumes. ("A breath together," as the protocol's own documentation names this closing moment, is not an instruction to breathe in any literal or synchronized sense — it names the short gap between the contained sound and *Continue*, not a physiological act.) Containment here functions to protect the orientation just established in step 2, not to extend, comment on, or elaborate it.

4. **Continue.** The director counts off and the ensemble plays. No discussion, no debrief.

This sequence maps onto the threshold hypothesis advanced in Section 5, with one refinement specific to this instantiation. Section 5 describes the middle phase generically as liminal entrainment, a term broad enough to cover the synchrony-based mechanisms reviewed in Section 2.8. In this particular protocol, however, the mechanism is not interpersonal synchrony but the protection of an already-completed internal act: *Pause* and *Orient* correspond to separation and internal orientation, *Contain* corresponds to holding that orientation open without disturbing it, and *Continue* corresponds to coordinated entry into the shared activity — now undertaken from a located internal starting point rather than an unexamined one.

Why color, specifically, for Orient. The choice of color as the orienting channel is deliberate rather than incidental. I selected color because it offers a non-pathologizing route to internal-state orientation — one that does not ask the musician to name, categorize, or verbally disclose an emotional or attentional state in the way a spoken check-in would. This has three further design consequences. First, it keeps cognitive burden low: locating a color requires no retrieval of vocabulary, no self-diagnosis, and no composition of an answer, so it does not compete for the cognitive resources the ensemble is about to direct toward the music. Second, it preserves privacy: because nothing is shared or evaluated, the step carries none of the interpersonal risk that a spoken disclosure would. Third, color functions as a universal medium carrying individualized content (Section 2.16): broadly legible across a heterogeneous group without requiring shared vocabulary, while the specific meaning any participant attaches to their chosen color remains entirely their own. This is a useful point of contrast with Edmondson's (1999) construct of psychological safety (Section 2.3), which concerns a team's confidence that disclosure will not be punished. Orient sidesteps that requirement altogether rather than satisfying it — readiness is pursued through an act that requires no disclosure to begin with, which may make it usable in groups, such as a newly assembled honor band, that have not yet had time to develop a climate of psychological safety in Edmondson's sense. Section 2.16 develops the universal-medium/individualized-content rationale and what independent evidence does and does not support about it; Section 2.17 distinguishes this step directly from the nearest and most likely-to-be-assumed precedent, *Zones of Regulation*, with which it should not be conflated.

Why sound or silence, specifically, for Contain. The interval used in this step — sound or silence — functions as containment, not entertainment. It is not offered as musical content to be appreciated, interpreted, or evaluated, and it is not a preview or fragment of the piece about to be rehearsed. Its function is to hold a protected space around the internal orientation just located in step 2 — closer to Winnicott's (1960) concept of a *holding environment*, an environment whose purpose is to support an internal process by not intruding on it, than to a stimulus intended to do something to the listener.

This same logic constrains which sounds, if a sustained sound rather than silence is used, are appropriate to that holding function. Music-cognition research on expectation (Meyer, 1956; Huron, 2006) indicates that functional, tonally directional harmony — a chord with a clear major or minor

quality, a cadential progression, a dominant sonority implying resolution — recruits anticipatory attention and pulls a listener forward, toward an outcome that has not yet happened. That directional pull works against containment, and it would also impose an affective category (major- or minor-feeling) on the interval in much the same way a verbal check-in would impose a category on an internal state. An open or non-functional sonority — a drone or pedal tone, an unharmonized octave or unison, or an open fifth without a third — avoids this: it is harmonically present without being harmonically evaluative or directional, and in a jazz context it is also idiomatically continuous with the modal and quartal voicings already native to the repertoire. If a sustained sound is used for Contain, this paper treats open, non-functional harmony as the more defensible choice relative to functional tonal harmony, on these grounds — *not* as a claim that sound is preferable to silence, or silence to sound.

This paper does not attempt to adjudicate sound against silence as the better choice for Contain. Both are consistent with the holding requirement described above, and nothing in the present framework requires deciding between them. Whether an open sustained sonority outperforms silence, or vice versa, for the function of protecting internal orientation is treated here as an open empirical question for future research (Section 9, Section 10), not as a claim this paper resolves.

8.3 The Observation That Motivated This Theory

I developed and piloted the protocol across a university jazz program — an improvisation class and several combo and big band ensembles — and a community choir. Directors who used it struggled to describe the difference precisely, and what their reports did not focus on is as telling as what they did: mood, morale, and enjoyment were rarely mentioned. What they kept returning to instead was the quality of entry itself. Ensembles appeared to settle more quickly. Instructions seemed to require less repetition. Attention gathered with less effort. The room did not necessarily become quieter or more enthusiastic — members appeared to arrive together, at times playing with a different relationship to rhythm, described as bolder. Directors were not reporting a change in what the ensemble was doing. They were reporting a change in how the ensemble arrived. What seemed to change was not the task itself, but the group’s condition at the moment the task began. The difference was usually most apparent by contrast, noticed against rehearsals where no such transition had occurred.

That language — entry, arrival, settling, rather than mood or energy — lines up closely with how this paper defines the construct (Section 3): collective readiness is framed throughout as a matter of coordinated entry, not of how members feel. The directors’ own difficulty naming what they were seeing, and their independent convergence on entry-quality language rather than emotional language, is part of what motivated treating this as a phenomenon worth a name, rather than as an instance of something already well described.

Students in these ensembles described something related but distinct — and the difference between the two accounts is itself worth noting. Directors, observing from outside, described something about the group's entry; students, reporting from inside, described something about their own state. Many students described the practice as supporting focus and ease before playing — "smooth," "balanced," language associated with flow — though not every student reported a noticeable change, and the positive cast of these descriptions sits a little oddly next to the no-target-state design intent of Section 3.2, worth flagging rather than smoothing over. The mix of responses is itself informative: it is not what we'd expect if collective readiness required everyone to converge on the same internal experience, but it is consistent with the account developed in Section 8.5, where what the group shares is a structural frame, not identical content. The outside/inside split tracks the antecedent-outcome distinction this paper develops in Section 3.1 more cleanly than either account does alone: language like "smooth" and "balanced" is better read as evidence for internal state orientation, the antecedent, than as direct evidence of the group-level outcome this paper is naming. And where students described something "associated with flow," that should not be confused with Sawyer's (2003) group flow (Section 2.7), a different, in-activity construct.

This is anecdotal evidence, gathered informally by me rather than through independent or controlled observation. It motivates the theory that follows; it does not confirm it. Section 9 proposes how that distinction could eventually be tested.

8.4 Why a Brief Pre-Downbeat Threshold May Work

The jazz-listening literature reviewed in Section 2.10 helps explain why such a brief protocol might matter disproportionately to its length, and clarifies what kind of help it is providing, for most of the settings in which it has been tried (Section 8.3): a university jazz improvisation class and three combo and big band performance groups. Improvised ensemble performance depends on a demanding, continuous form of mutual listening (Berliner, 1994) and on a felt sense of shared groove that is not reducible to any one player's individual timing (Monson, 1996) — but that outward-directed listening presupposes that each player already has some located sense of their own attention to bring to it. When musicians arrive at rehearsal carrying different, unexamined attentional states — distracted, focused, preoccupied — each player's contribution to mutual listening is itself unanchored, and the ensemble typically resolves these differences in real time, in public, while already playing. The Pause–Orient–Contain–Continue protocol does not attempt to manufacture interpersonal synchrony directly, and it does not attempt to change any player's attentional state before they begin. Instead, by securing and protecting each player's internal orientation before the downbeat, it gives the mutual listening that follows a located starting point once *Continue* begins — whatever that location turns out to be. Any resulting synchrony among players is, on this account, a downstream consequence of several internally oriented individuals entering together — consistent with the threshold hypothesis, but achieved through internal orientation and protection (Section 8.2) rather than through the direct interpersonal entrainment mechanisms reviewed in Section 2.8.

The community choir surveyed alongside these jazz settings (Section 8.3) is a meaningfully different case, and it is worth being precise about why. Choral singing is typically notated and rehearsed rather than improvised, so the demanding, moment-to-moment listening literature reviewed above does not describe it directly. The same underlying logic — that mutual coordination presupposes each member already has a located sense of their own attention to bring to it — plausibly extends to choral contexts as well, since ensemble blend and entrance timing still depend on members listening outward from some starting point. But this paper has no jazz-specific literature establishing that extension, and the choir result should be read as a single additional data point consistent with the broader hypothesis, not as independently grounded in the reasoning above.

8.5 From Internal Orientation to Collective Readiness: An Antecedent-Outcome Account

Sections 8.2 through 8.4 establish that the protocol's mechanism operates at the individual level: each musician privately locates a color; nothing is shared, compared, or disclosed; the Contain step protects that private act rather than synchronizing it with anyone else's. Section 3.1 named this individual-level act internal state orientation, and proposed that collective readiness is best understood as the group-level outcome it is hypothesized to produce, rather than a rival description of the same thing. This section asks what structural conditions would have to hold for that outcome relationship to be real, and what would remain in doubt even if they did.

Two models of emergence. Kozlowski and Klein's (2000) distinction between composition and compilation (Section 2.13) gives the antecedent-outcome relationship a precise form. If collective readiness were produced from internal state orientation by a *composition* process — the route by which collective efficacy or cohesion are typically modeled as emerging, through convergence on shared content across members (Bandura, 1997; Carron, Brawley, & Widmeyer, 1998) — then a step in which members' internal states diverge and remain unknown to one another should work against, not toward, the outcome. That would be a serious problem for the antecedent-outcome account: the protocol would be holding the antecedent at the individual level (Section 3.2) while doing nothing to produce the conditions composition-based emergence requires.

The more defensible reading is that internal state orientation produces collective readiness, when it does, through a *compilation* process: a group-level outcome that emerges from the **pattern** of individual-level acts rather than from their **content converging**. What the group shares is not the color any member locates, but the structural fact that every member performs the same act, using the same external referent (the wheel), within the same marked interval (Pause), held by the same containing frame (Contain) — at the same time. On this account, the relevant unit of "sharedness" is not the content of anyone's internal orientation but the temporal and structural envelope within which divergent internal orientations are simultaneously performed and held. This is consistent with Turner's (1969) account of communitas (Section 2.9): the bond Turner describes among co-

participants in a liminal rite does not depend on participants undergoing identical inner experiences, only on their shared participation in the same threshold passage. It is also consistent with the original definition in Section 3, which explicitly denies that collective readiness requires emotional similarity — a claim that follows naturally once the outcome is modeled as compilation rather than composition, since compilation-based outcomes are, by definition, constituted by variation among members rather than threatened by it. The heterogeneity in the student survey responses reported in Section 8.3 — some students describing a noticeable shift, others reporting none — fits this prediction: a composition-based account would need that variation explained away, while a compilation-based account treats it as the expected shape of the antecedent, not a problem for the outcome.

Composition models, in Kozlowski and Klein's (2000) framework, describe convergence in *psychological content* — members coming to hold the same belief, perception, or interpretation, typically through consensus or social influence. Everyone receiving the same acoustic stimulus during Contain is not an instance of this: no claim is made, or could coherently be made under this design, that members converge on any belief or interpretation of that stimulus. Section 8.2 states the opposite directly — the sound carries no content for anyone to converge on. A shared physical input is not a composition-type psychological construct merely because it is identical for every member who receives it.

This draws on the contextual/emergent distinction introduced in Section 2.13. *Orient* supplies the only emergent process at stake in this protocol: individually divergent content (a located color) hypothesized to compile into a group-level outcome. *Pause* and *Contain* are not emergent constructs at all; they are contextual conditions — structural features of the situation, held constant and identical across members, that create the circumstances under which compilation can occur, without themselves constituting a second, independent emergent process. Collective readiness, on this account, is not produced by internal state orientation alone, but by internal state orientation occurring within this shared contextual frame — which is also why the antecedent and the outcome are not interchangeable: internal state orientation could in principle occur without producing collective readiness, if the shared context that allows it to compile into a group-level outcome were absent.

What remains unresolved. This account is a plausible theoretical model of the antecedent-outcome relationship, not a demonstrated one, and it leaves open a question that cannot be settled on conceptual grounds alone: is temporal and structural simultaneity — everyone orienting at the same marked moment, within the same frame — *sufficient* to convert internal state orientation into a genuine group-level outcome, or does it merely describe several individual-level processes occurring in parallel, dressed in the language of "the group" without anything actually emerging at that level? Multilevel theory itself flags this as a live methodological problem rather than a solved one: compilation-based emergence is, in Kozlowski and Klein's (2000) own assessment, comparatively under-explored relative to composition-based emergence in the organizational literature, in part because it is harder to verify empirically that something has emerged at the higher level rather than

merely being redescribed there. This paper does not resolve that question; it is named explicitly in Section 10 as one of the framework's most consequential open problems. Any future measurement program (Section 9) testing the antecedent-outcome relationship proposed here will need to address it directly — for instance, by testing whether group-level outcomes (Section 6) are predicted by the *pattern* of individual-level internal state orientation (e.g., its timing or consistency across members) over and above what individual-level internal state orientation alone, summed or averaged without reference to the group, would predict.

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9. Directions for Future Research

This theory generates a clear empirical agenda, even though none of it has yet been carried out.

The most basic open question is whether collective readiness is a single, coherent construct, or whether the pattern described in Section 8.3 is better explained by something simpler — internal state orientation alone, ordinary interpersonal synchrony (Hove & Risen, 2009), or facilitator expectation. The cleanest way to find out would be to test the protocol's components separately: what happens when groups do Orient without Contain, or Contain without Orient, compared to the full sequence or no structured pause at all? If either component alone reproduces the full effect, the compilation account in Section 8.5 would need revising. If only the combination works, that would be real support for treating collective readiness as more than a relabeling of something already well understood.

A second direction would test the antecedent-outcome relationship in Section 3.1 directly: measuring internal state orientation at the individual level and collective readiness at the group level separately, to see whether the group-level pattern is fully explained by individual orientation summed up, or whether something about the pattern across members — not just its average — predicts outcomes on its own. A result of the second kind would be evidence for genuine compilation; a result of the first kind would suggest the construct, as currently defined, doesn't add much beyond its individual-level antecedent. Neither result, on its own, would distinguish this from ordinary synchrony, which is why the component-separation test above matters more.

A third direction concerns the Contain step specifically: whether an open, non-functional sustained sound (Section 8.2) actually performs better than silence or conventional tonal harmony, a question this paper has so far only argued for on theoretical grounds.

Beyond these, the standard tools of small-group research — self-report measures modeled on existing scales (e.g., Edmondson, 1999), behavioral coding of how quickly groups settle into coordinated activity, and longitudinal tracking of whether collective readiness behaves more like a stable group trait or a session-by-session state — would help establish whether the construct, once tested, holds up as something distinct from the neighboring constructs surveyed in Section 2.

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10. Future Questions

The concept of collective readiness remains exploratory. Several questions warrant further investigation:

- Can collective readiness be reliably observed by an outside party, or only sensed by group members themselves?
- Can it be measured with the same rigor that has been brought to cohesion, efficacy, and psychological safety?
- Can it be cultivated remotely, in groups that are not physically co-present?
- What precisely distinguishes it from cohesion or efficacy at the level of underlying mechanism, rather than definition alone?
- Does collective readiness causally influence performance outcomes, or does it merely correlate with other antecedents of performance?
- Can groups experience collective readiness without physical proximity, given that much of the synchrony literature reviewed in Section 2.8 has focused on co-located, embodied interaction?
- What role do ritual and temporal synchronization specifically play in its development, as opposed to other plausible mechanisms such as shared attention or verbal framing alone?
- Is collective readiness better modeled as a binary threshold that a group crosses, or as a continuous variable that admits of degrees?
- Does the Pause–Orient–Contain–Continue protocol observed in ensemble settings (Section 8) generalize to non-musical groups — classrooms, meetings, sports teams — where the activity that follows does not depend on the same real-time auditory listening that defines jazz performance?
- Within the Contain step, when a sustained sound rather than silence is used, does an open, non-functional sonority (a drone, an unharmonized octave, or an open fifth without a third) outperform silence at protecting internal orientation — and does either outperform the other, or are they functionally interchangeable? This paper treats the comparison as undecided.

- For the Orient step, does color in practice function as the universal-medium/individualized-content channel the design intends (Section 2.16), with participants' specific color choices remaining genuinely idiosyncratic, or do the shared, population-level color-emotion associations documented by Jonauskaite et al. (2020) end up narrowing what participants feel they can locate?
- Is collective readiness well-specified as a single construct, or does it reduce to internal state orientation alone, to the contextual marking of Pause and Contain alone, or to ordinary synchrony under a new name? This is the paper's central open question (Section 11), and Section 9 proposes how it might eventually be resolved.
- More generally, for any element of a threshold protocol — the orienting channel, the containing sound, the length of the pause — what is the minimal design requirement it must satisfy, and which of these requirements are essential to collective readiness versus incidental to this particular implementation?

These questions suggest a potentially fertile area for future theoretical and applied work spanning team science, ritual studies, music psychology, and organizational behavior.

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11. Limitations and Scope

This is a theory-building paper, and it is worth being plain about what that does and does not mean. Section 1 distinguished two questions: whether something is happening, and what that something is. The first is supported by anecdotal observation (Section 8.3); the theory developed here addresses the second, and has not demonstrated it.

The most important limitation is that every piece of support offered for collective readiness is evidence for something else — cohesion, collective efficacy, psychological safety, synchrony, multilevel emergence, ritual liminality — combined with an argument that collective readiness should resemble these established constructs closely enough to be plausible. No direct measurement of collective readiness exists yet. A specific version of this gap is whether it is even one construct rather than two: the protocol bundles an individual-level act (Orient) with a shared structural condition (Contain), and this paper has not shown that the two are jointly necessary, or that the pattern observed couldn't be explained more simply — by individual orientation alone, by ordinary interpersonal synchrony, or by facilitator expectation. Section 9 proposes how that could eventually be tested; it has not been.

It is also worth naming that the theory was built backward from a protocol I already believed worked, rather than used to predict the protocol's effects in advance. A handful of claims in this paper go beyond what I had already believed — that the protocol's components should behave differently

when separated, that a particular kind of harmonic structure should outperform others in the Contain step, and that color choices should or shouldn't cluster more than an arbitrary channel would — and those are the claims this paper's theoretical contribution should be judged on, not the protocol's prior, already-believed-in success.

Finally, the observation that motivated all of this (Section 8.3) is anecdotal: gathered informally by me, not independently verified, and concerning a small number of settings. It should be read as the reason to take the theory seriously, not as confirmation of it.

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12. Conclusion

Whether collective readiness ultimately proves to be a distinct construct, a compilation process bound inside a contextual frame, or a more familiar mechanism — ordinary synchrony, aggregated individual readiness, facilitator expectation — operating under an unfamiliar name, is an empirical question, and this paper has been explicit about which of its claims that question has not yet settled (Section 11).

What is harder to set aside than any of this paper's current theoretical apparatus is the observation that motivated it: four directors across a university jazz program and a community choir, working from my account, kept describing the same thing in open-ended terms — a group entering an activity differently depending on what happened in the seconds before it began. This paper's claim is not that the difference has been demonstrated to be a property of the group rather than of its members, only that it is consistent and specific enough to deserve the direct, falsifiable test it has not yet received. The central question remains simple: what allows a collection of individuals to become a functioning collective before shared action occurs? Collective readiness is offered as a name for one possible answer, not yet a demonstration of it — a name for the difference between a group that enters fragmented and a group that enters gathered.

Some groups enter fragmented. Some enter gathered.

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